

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PINT PGOV TH

SUBJ: PRAMAN ADIREKSAN AND COUP PLOTTING

SUMMARY: ON FEB 25, EMBOFF HAD LUNCH WITH PONGPHON ADIREKSAN, SON AND PERSONAL SECRETARY TO DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE PRAMAN ADIREKSAN. THE CONVERSATION CENTERED AROUND THE MILITARY ALERT OF FEB 24, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF COUP D'ETAT. DAO HAS APPENDED COMMENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. PONGPHON OBVIOUSLY FEELS THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF A COUP D'ETAT HAS INCREASED, AND THAT THERE WILL MOST PROBABLY BE NO ELECTIONS ON APRIL 4. HE SAID THAT HE AND HIS FATHER PERSONALLY HOPE THAT THERE WILL BE ELECTIONS BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE IN DEMOCRACY, AND THEY WANT TO WIN IN THE ELECTIONS BY DEMOCRATIC MEANS.

2. PONGPHON SAID THAT THE MILITARY ALERT CALLED ON THE NIGHT OF FEB 24 WAS PRACTICE FOR A REAL COUP. HE SAID THAT ARMY LEADERS ARE DEFINITELY PLANNING TO STAGE A COUP BEFORE THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS (HE ALSO SAID THAT THE NAVY

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AS WELL AS THE ARMY WAS PUT ON ALERT, BUT HE WASN'T SURE ABOUT THE AIR FORCE). HE SAID THAT THE FINAL DECISION TO

STAGE A COUP HAS NOT YET BEEN MADE, BUT THAT IT WILL PROBABLY BE MADE SOON. HE SAID THAT HIS FATHER (PRAMAN ADIREKSAN) WAS ASKED TO SIGN THE ALERT ORDER (PONGPHON SAID THAT HIS FATHER IS THE ONLY PERSON WHO CAN SIGN A LEGAL ALERT ORDER), BUT THAT HE REFUSED TO SIGN IT FOR FEAR THAT IT WOULD LEAVE HIM OPEN TO ACCUSATIONS OF PLOTTING A COUP (PONGPHON SAYS THAT HE IS NOT INVOLVED IN THE PLOTTING). HE SAID THAT THE ORDER HAD TO BE ISSUED BY BUNCHAI VERBALLY. PONGPHON SAID THAT HIS FATHER'S PUBLIC DISCLAIMER OF ANY KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT THE ALERT WAS ABOUT WAS UNTRUE, AND MADE SOLELY FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION.

3. PONGPHON SAID THAT THERE IS A DISPUTE IN THE ARMY OVER WHAT DIRECTION A COUP SHOULD TAKE. COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GEN. BUNCHAI BUMRONGPHONG, GEN. SOEM NA NAKHON, AND GEN. PRASOET THAMMASIRI ARE ALL PUSHING FOR A COUP, BUT WANT A CIVILIAN LED GOVERNMENT WITH LITTLE OR NO DIRECT MILITARY INVOLVEMENT. HE SAID THAT THESE MEN ARE PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERS, AND DO NOT WANT TO SEE THE MILITARY RETURN TO THE OLD WAYS (PRE-OCTOBER 1973). AN OPPOSING FACTION IS LED BY GENERALS WITHUN YASAWAT AND CHALAT HIRANYASIRI. PONGPHON SAID THAT THESE TWO MEN ARE POLITICALLY AMBITIOUS, ESPECIALLY WITHUN (WHO IS THE MOST LIKELY GENERAL TO CAUSE REAL TROUBLE). THEY BOTH WANT DIRECT MILITARY CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT. WITHUN IS DEMANDING THAT HE BE GIVEN CONTROL OF THE POLICE, AND CHALAT WANTS TO BE COMMANDER-IN- CHIEF OF THE ARMY. PONGPHON SAID THAT BOTH MEN ARE DEMANDING A RETURN TO SARIT-STYLE GOVERNMENT, LED BY THEMSELVES.

4. PONGPHON SAID THAT HIS FATHER FEELS THAT HE WILL HEAD ANY GOVERNMENT BACKED BY BUNCHAI'S GROUPS, BUT IF WITHUN'S VIEWS WIN OUT, HE WILL HAVE NO PLACE IN THE GOVERNMENT AT ALL. PONGPHON DOES NOT FEEL THAT KHUKRIT WILL HEAD ANY MILITARY BACKED GOVERNMENT.

5. PONGPHON SAID THAT THE ARMY WILL NEED A FAIRLY GOOD EXCUSE TO STAGE A COUP. THE SITUATION IN SURAT THANI MAY BE PART OF ANY PRETEXT USED. HE SAID THAT IF THE ARMY DOES MOVE, THEY WILL ROUND UP LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE LIKELY TO

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OPPOSE IT, AND WILL MAKE A STRONG AND DECISIVE EFFORT TO CRUSH THE LEFT. PONGPHON SAID THAT ANY COUP WILL BE BLOODY, BUT IT IS A CHOICE BETWEEN SAVING DEMOCRACY AND SAVING THAILAND.

6. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH NOT ALL OF THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE MILITARY ALERT ARE CLEAR, THE SOURCE OF THIS CABLE IS IN A POSITION TO KNOW HIS FATHER'S VIEW OF THE SITUATION. HIS COMMENTS THAT A COUP IS LIKELY BEFORE APRIL 4 CANNOT REPEAT CANNOT BE IGNORED, ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT RPT

NOT CLEAR THAT PRAMAN HAS AS MUCH INFLUENCE WITH THE MILITARY AS PONGPHON SEEMS TO THINK. IT WAS STRIKING TO EMOFF WHO SPOKE WITH HIM, HOWEVER, THAT IMPLICIT THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE CONVERSATION WAS PONGPHON'S PERSONAL CONVICTION THAT HIS FATHER WILL BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER IN A MILITARY BACKED GOVERNMENT.

7. DAO COMMENT: LEGAL AUTHORITY TO DIRECT ANY ACTION ON THE PART OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY LIES IN THE PERSON OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMY, GEN. BUNCHAI. SHOULD BUNCHAI, FOR REASONS OF HIS OWN, DESIRE TO PUT THE STIGMA FOR AN UNPOPULAR ACTION ON THE BACK OF SOMEONE ELSE, HE MIGHT HAVE THE ORDER SIGNED BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE. BUNCHAI IS NOT BOUND BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE'S ORDERS. END DAO COMMENT.

8. WHATEVER THE EVENTS OF LAST NIGHT (AND WE DO NOT RPT NOT ACCEPT BUNCHAI'S EXPLANATION THAT THIS WAS A MERE PRACTICE), THE SITUATION IS NOW CALM. BUNCHAI'S PLEDGE OF SUPPORT FOR THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS HAS EASED TENSIONS. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT RPT NOT BELIEVE WE HAVE HEARD THE LAST OF THIS AND, AS REPORTED EARLIER, BELIEVE THE POSSIBILITY OF MILITARY OR MILITARY-CIVILIAN ACTION TO POSTPONE THE ELECTIONS WILL INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS.
WHITEHOUSE

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